

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat

AUGUST 1987

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

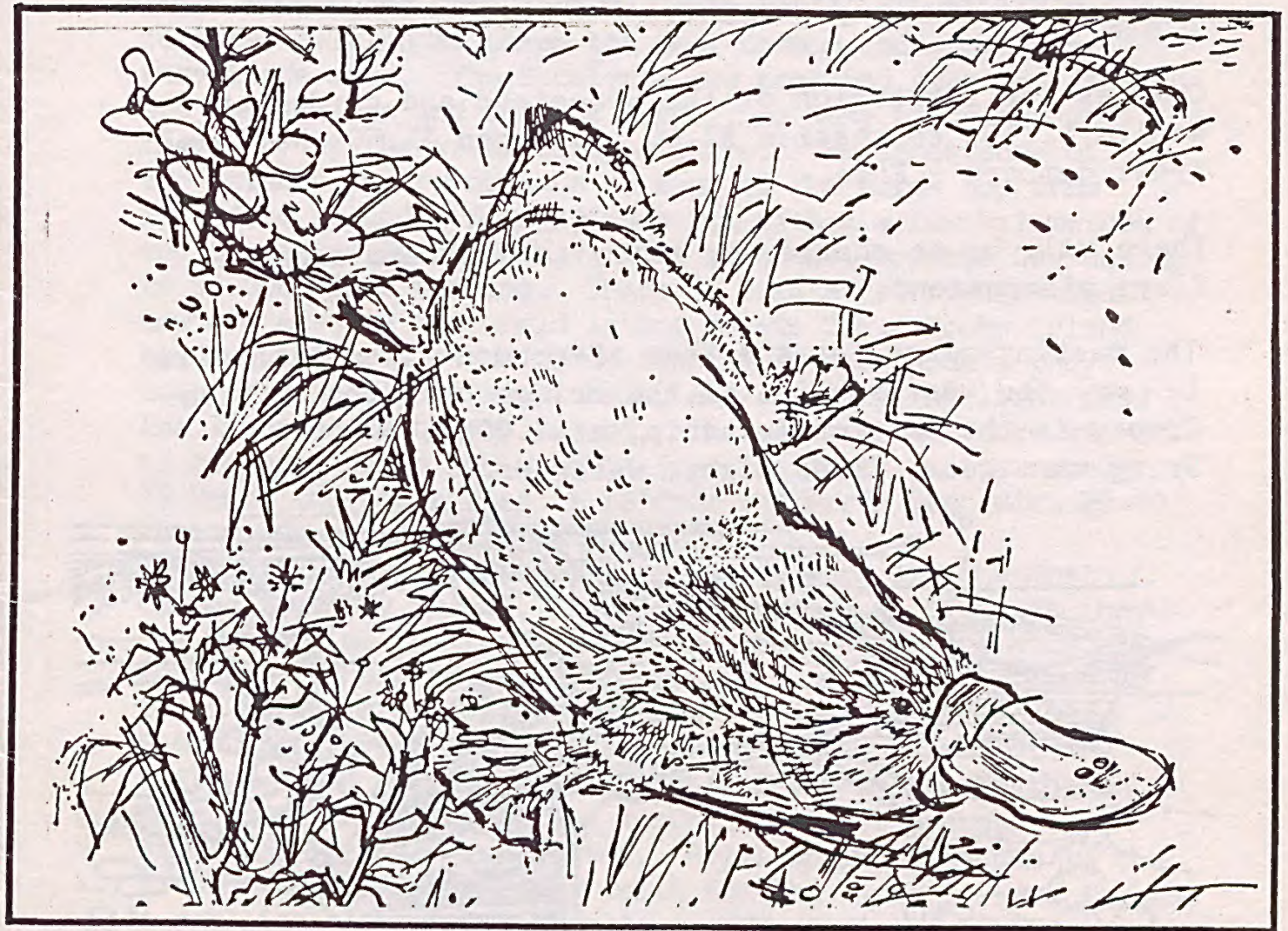
Meeting : August 7 - Mr. P. Stevens - "The Platypus"

Meeting : September 4 - Mr. T. White - "Soil Conservation"

Excursion : August 9 - Skipton-Mooramong - Platypus search

Excursion : September 6 - Cambelltown, with Creswick F.N.C.

Dr. F. Harrap



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Meetings as specified are held at the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street Sth., Art Building, commencing at 7.30 p.m.
EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM CROCKERS, cnr. STURT AND ARM-STRONG STS., BALLARAT, at 9.30 a.m. for FULL DAY OUTINGS OR AT 1.30 p.m. for HALF DAY*

August Meeting - Guest Speaker

Mr. Paul Stevens of Ballarat will replace Mr. Keith Twyford, on the subject of 'The Platypus', at this months meeting. Both gentlemen have been involved in research on Ornithorhynchus. We are grateful to Paul for substituting for Keith who has recently taken up employment with the Dept. of Conservation Forests and Lands in the Orbost region.

Excursion - August 9th

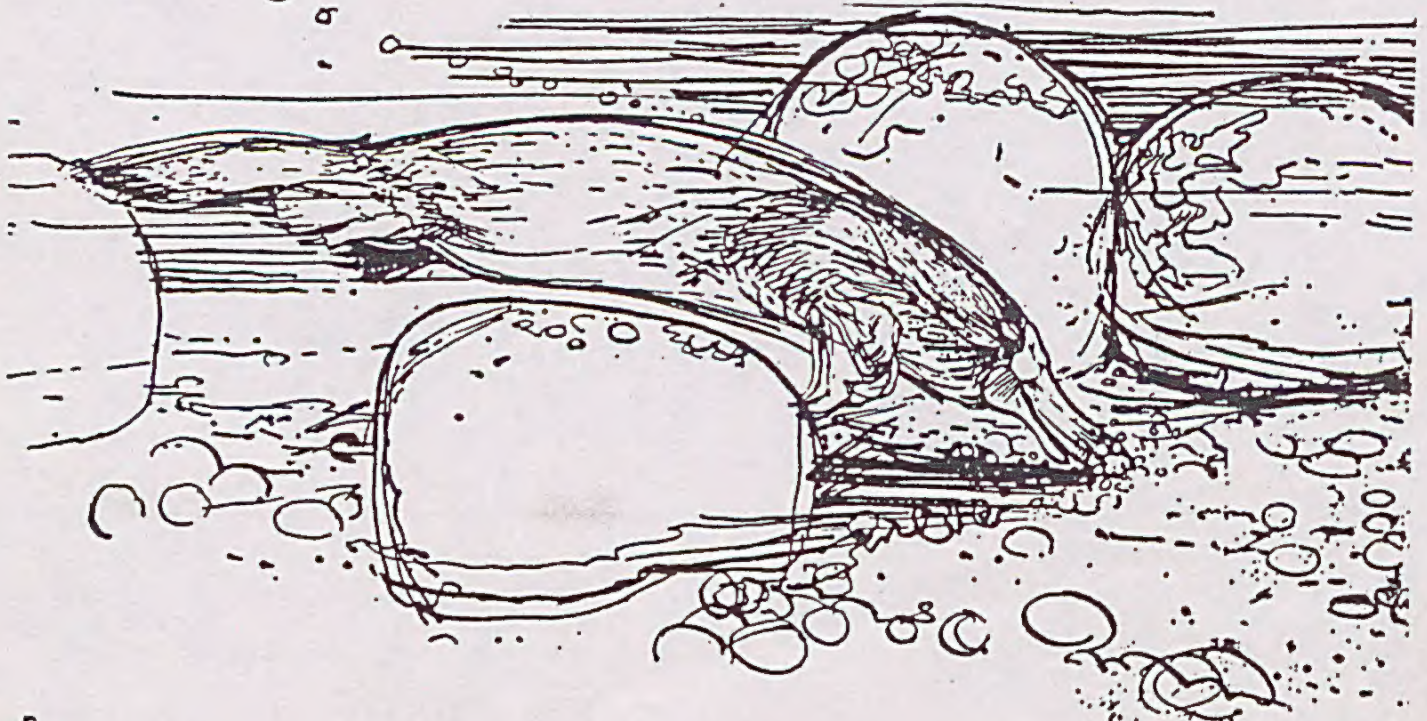
The afternoon excursion will depart at 1.30pm from Crockers Corner, as usual, but will continue until after dusk as we will be involved in some platypus 'field study' in the Skipton area. The first afternoon venue to be visited will be Mooramong, a National Trust property near Skipton where planting of native trees and shrubs has been taking place.

Charges for inspection of the Homestead and garden are: adults \$2.50, concession \$2.00, children \$1.50, National Trust members - Free.

There will be no charge for entry to the farm area and flora plantations.

The meeting place for the late afternoon expedition will be on the western side of the bridge over the Mt. Emu Creek, in the Skipton Township, at 4.00pm.

Bring warm gear, flash light, water proof foot wear!



Bird Migration in Torres Strait - Dr. Garnett

Dr. Garnett spent six years in North Queensland studying turtles and crocodiles and he became fascinated with the birds and their migration patterns.

For untold centuries birds would have followed dry land over some islands which are mountain caps, others that are sand cays and some volcanoes long dead, to the Cape York Peninsula. The four wheel drive vehicle traffic has doubled each year for the past five years to this area. Many other people fly up and a large proportion of these are bird watchers and amateur naturalists.

In the straits the tides are fast because of the junction of the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. These shallow seas once supported a large fleet of luggers and pearling industries.

The country of Cape York has many grassy plains and Melaleuca forests, Melaleucas being the most common and growing to a very large size. The Eucalypts are poor and stunted. There are many swamps and lagoons supporting many birds and when these dry up the water birds migrate. The importance of the islands is now obvious as many of the birds hop from island to island. Some islands are within a few kilometres of the Papua New Guinea coast. One of these, Bramble Cay has up to 50,000 birds nesting. There is also a rat species found nowhere else in the world living on the Cay. Booby Island has had 140 species of birds identified and banded; they come principally at night being attracted by the light from the light house on the island. The seasons have some effect on migration when the wind is from the South East at about 15 knots and again when it is from the North West with 20-40 knot winds and lots of rain.

Frigate Birds, Brown Booby and Sooty Tern are the most common on Booby Island. Birds breed there as often as they can because of the teeming food source. Terns are studied because of their apparent "prediction" of drought. Crested Terns have a great variety in the patterns of their eggs. Shearwaters breed on the north of the South Island of New Zealand, then pass through Torres Straits to the Northern Territory, down the Western Australian Coast, across the Bight and back to New Zealand. Royal Spoonbills feed in the fresh water swamp then fly north for the winter. Pied Herons a smallish elegant bird, follows. The Striated, or Mangrove Heron is resident on an island in Torres Strait. A reasonable

abundance of Magpie Geese in the Northern Territory and some of these birds have been tested for Newcastle's disease; as are all the birds caught and banded. Some Grey Teal banded in the Riverina were found in New Guinea, on certain nights the birds come in thousands.

Black Breasted Buzzards and Whistling Kites do not migrate but the Nankeen Kestrel, Swamp Harriers and possibly Peregrine Falcons do. Swamp Harriers from Tasmania migrate to the Brisbane area, while those birds already there go to New Guinea.

Superb or Purple-Crowned Fruit Doves were found on Booby Island; these birds disperse as far as Victoria and do not fit in to any pattern. They are very fat when netted. Pigeons fly individually, except the Torres Strait Pigeon which are in large flocks.

Mist nets are used for catching these birds; these were first used by the Japanese.

A kingfisher netted was a Rough Crested Paradise Kingfisher, a very colourful bird which nests in termite mounds. Some go across the straits to and from New Guinea while others live all their lives in New Guinea. Other migrants are the Forest Kingfishers and the Sacred Kingfisher.

Red Breasted Pittas and Rainbow Birds are so regular in their migrating times the Islanders use them to plant the vegetables by!! Many birds die on the islands because of exhaustion. These are the perching birds. Most birds migrate when there is a full moon. The Pittas including the Noisy Pitta migrate when there is no moon.

Reed Warblers, Fly Catchers and Rufous Fantails are common migrants while Satin Fly catchers go to the Highlands, also Tawney Grass Birds, although they are not usually migratory birds. Spangled drongos were one of the daylight migrants and it is thought that Lotus Birds may migrate because they disappear when the swamps dry up.

Of the many birds that migrate to and from Cape York Peninsula it is very likely that some are in rainforests or relict from New Guinea, and are genetically isolated from New Guinea families. One, the White Streaked Honeyeater, is endemic to Cape York Peninsula.

Dr. Garnett was thanked by L. Fink.

Committee Meeting

The next meeting of Committee will be held at 1112 Ligar St., on Wednesday August 19th, at 8pm.

Stella Bedggod Memorial Lecture
Mr Peter Kinchington "Why go North"

Peter is a Marine Biologist and keen marine photographer. He was at the Marine Study Centre for some time and is now a consultant with the Board of Works.

First he showed a Hibiscus flower, zoomed on to the stamens and then to the pollen showing the little hooks used to carry the pollen from plant to plant. A close up of moss with its interesting spore cases was also shown.

Peter's favorite subject, however, is Aquatic animals. The first shown was DAPHNIA with its two types of eggs waiting to be fertilised, and others fertilised. Next, a CYCLOP or COPEPOD. These are micro crustaceans and feed on plants and plankton, their eyes see only light and dark and they provide food for a number of water fowl, this group are found in fresh water ponds, along with wrigglers, damselfly larvae which have mouth parts that capture tadpoles for food, and a host of other aquatic creatures.

Then onto the marine life of our sea shores and seas, with "old wives" or "angel fish", and NUDIBRANK, called such because of its gills. They get their colour from the sponges they eat and using the sponge toxins for their own protection. Another one eats the sea creatures, that in turn eat plankton while others eat sea anemones, hydroids and corals and storing up the stinging cells for their own protection. All are brightly coloured. One known as a sap sucker eats seaweeds. They store up energy from the seaweed which in turn gets it from the sun "solar powered!" Several of these were creatures from Northern Australia on the coral reefs. One was a beautiful blue gilled worm, others were yellow. Over here in the South is the feather duster worm which feeds on minute particles floating by. At Point Cook Marine Reserve are white crusted rocks, which is actually a tube worm, some times called coral or Sydney coral, a planktonic worm about $2\frac{1}{2}$ mm long. One worm has long tentacles that bring back food to the mouth.

Sponges are animals that capture food through their holes. They cause a current that brings food and oxygen. There are three sponges, one calcium carbonate called spicules with a variety of

shapes, others with spicules like golf balls budding off, and all with a variety of shapes and colours.

The action of the water over some sponges causes a filtration system that leaves the sponge nothing to do!

One of the most beautiful around Beaumauris is a relative of the sea anemone or corals, called a hydroid, another relative is the speckled sea anemone. These are sticky to touch mainly through the mini harpoons. One anemone is green, another is sometimes dangerous to people with allergic reactions.

The colonial COELENTERATES are joined by a membrane. There are coral hermaphrodites and some are like a group of sea anemones or the stone-coral. Soft corals have stinging spicules to capture prey.

Young crabs are also part of the plankton circle- a crab with sea grass for camouflage- another with cunjevoi - and a bright red Sea Tulip.

Abalone with its swim holes and scalloped eyes, starfish, tube fish- were other of the slides shown. Starfish eat mussels by completely covering the mussel turning their stomach inside out sucking out the juices. One is called a sea biscuit. The relatives of starfish, the sea urchins were shown. These have spines and tube feet. Next a fish about 4cm long, with bright colours of blue and yellow, and a sea horse about 5cm long. The male sea horses give "birth" by having the female deposit the eggs in the male pouch.

We saw squid and mud oysters. Mud oysters have planktonic young and now are farmed. Then the Tasmanian Blennie, a very small fish; the unique Hermit crab in an abandoned shell that is discarded as the crab grows. The tulip shell fish that drills holes in other shellfish to eat the meat; Blue ringed octopus which is actually a mollusc - their poison is TETRA-DOXIN, and is used to capture crabs. Other octopuses also fond of crabs are harmless, although they have a beak that can bite like a parrot.

There were also some larger fish and sea mammals, dolphins up to three metres long, and the bizarre and colourful ornate cowfish,

All these are found around our Victorian beaches, so why go North? (At least its warmer! Editor)

Peter was thanked for a unique and interesting evening by Ken McDonnell.

W.V.F.N.C. Camp-Out Meeting.

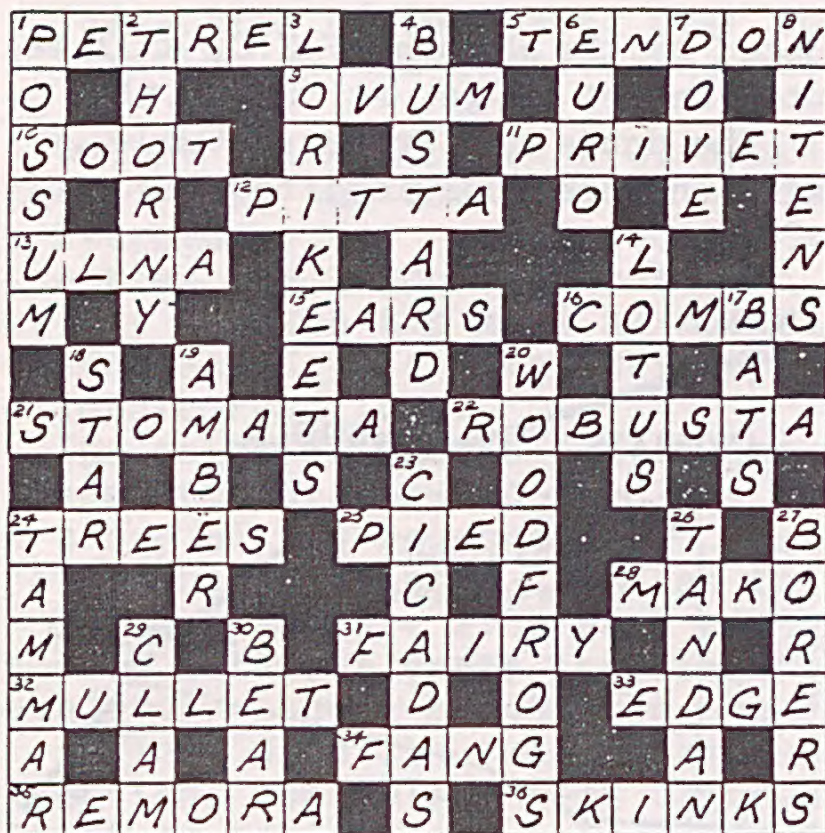
The next gathering, hosted by the Horsham F.N.C, will be centred around the Little Desert Lodge, at the Little Desert, Kiata/Winiam. The dates are Friday-Saturday, 28-30 August, For details on accommodation, booking etc, see July News Sheet p.2



Botanical Notes

Harvey Hooper, preparer of our botanical notes, will be away on tour for the next two months. The notes will resume in December. Bon voyage Rene and Harvey!





SOLUTION TO
NATURAL HISTORY
CROSSWORD
by
"TANTALUS"

(JULY NEWS-SHEET)

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R.A.O.U. Nesting Scheme

The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union is seeking helpers for the Nest Record Scheme, which gathers comprehensive data on breeding of birds. This involves recording, on prepared cards, detail of nesting - any record is valuable and welcome.

If any member would like to participate during the coming nesting season, please contact Greg Binns.